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ABSTRACT

In the French verb phrase, negation is often marked twice, by a proclitic element (ne) and by a second negative (such as "pas" or "rien"). Until the seventeenth century, the first element was obligatory, while a second negative was optionally added for emphasis or precision. Subsequently, the second negatives lost their asseverative quality and became obligatory, rendering the first negative (ne) redundant. Modern French now shows a tendency to delete this redundant element, although its deletion or retention is not necessarily free. Data for the present report were extracted from over 100 interviews recently tape-recorded in Tours, France. The speakers interviewed are all native Tourangeaux and represent a wide range of socio-economic groups. A preliminary analysis of the data suggests that the use of deletion of "ne" is conditioned by a complex of linguistic, stylistic, and demographic factors. Since one can identify an innovative and conservative variant, the use of each by different age, sex, and socio-economic groups will illustrate the propagation of an on-going syntactic change in French.
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December 29, 1977

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The status of the negative morpheme, NE, in the French of Tours

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In the French verb phrase, negation is often marked twice--by a proclitic element, NE, and by a second negative such as PAS or JAMAIS, as is illustrated in Number 1 on the handout. Until as late as the seventeenth century the second negatives were but optionally added for precision or emphasis. Eventually, however, as they lost their asseverative quality, they became required in all but a few lexicalized expressions. The grammaticalization of the second negatives rendered the first negative redundant, and grammarians note that as early as the sixteenth century this redundant element was occasionally dropped. Modern French speakers now show a strong tendency to delete the first negative, although its deletion or retention is not necessarily free. Ashby (1976) found that in the speech of 50 upper-middle class Parisians the first negative was absent from 44 per-cent of its potential occurrences overall, and that its deletion was apparently conditioned by grammatical, stylistic and social variables. Vincent and Sankoff (1977) noted in the French of

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Montreal the nearly categorical loss of NE. The few instances of its retention in their corpus were strongly dependent on style and subject matter, but were generally independent of the demographic characteristics of the speakers. Since these two recent studies disagree about the role of social variables in conditioning the deletion of NE, and since the Parisian corpus used in Ashby (1976) captures the speech of a single social class, it may be instructive to examine a third set of data. Doing so will also permit independent testing of hypotheses put forth in these studies.

The data to be considered in the present report come from a corpus of over 100 interviews which I recorded last year in and around Tours, an important center of commerce, agriculture and tourism, 235 kilometers south-west of Paris. All speakers are native Tourangeaux. To study the question at hand, I selected a sub-sample of 35 speakers, total, from two age strata. Members of the younger group range in age from 14 to 21 years, those of the older group from 51-64 years, so that at least a generation separates the two groups. Within each group there are an approximately equal number of women and men, and of speakers from each of three informally-defined social classes. Class A includes speakers with a university education, who occupy positions of prestige and importance in government, the professions and business. In Class B

are speakers with no more than a high-school diploma or the equivalent, who are in most cases white-collar workers or merchants. Class C includes those who have less than a high-school diploma and who are employed as blue-collar workers, artisans, and farmers. The younger speakers are categorized on the basis of their anticipated educational achievement and intended profession.

These 35 speakers used a total of 2,802 negative verb phrases in the course of their interviews. In only 46 per-cent of these tokens was the first negative retained, while in 64 per-cent it was deleted. No speaker retained the first negative in all instances--the highest rate of retention being 94 per-cent--while only one speaker categorically deleted it.

I shall now turn to an analysis of the grammatical, stylistic and social contexts in which these data occur. A word first needs to be said about the statistical treatment of the data. In judging the significance of the variation on which I am about to report, a chi-square test was applied in all cases. It has become clear to me, however, that the data are complex enough to merit a more sophisticated mathematical treatment. Consequently, I hope you will consider this paper a preliminary one, since I shall not report on all possible factors, and since before drafting the final report, I hope to submit the data to the Sankoff Variable Rule program.

Let us first consider the factor of age. As the information in Number 2 on the handout suggests, age is, according to the chi-square test, a highly significant social variable. While the older speakers as a group delete the first negative from 47.2 per-cent of its potential occurrences, the younger speakers do so 80.4 per-cent of the time. Furthermore, age is a very significant factor (at the .001 level or above) within the more narrowly circumscribed social categories shown in 2 b thru e on the handout. The one exception is 2 f, working class women, where the rate of first negative deletion among the older group approaches that of the younger. The significance of the age factor in these data, and also in the Parisian data of Ashby (1976) suggests very strongly that the loss of the first negative does represent an on-going change in the syntax of Modern French.

The variation among the three social classes was also shown to be highly significant by the chi-square test. The incidence of NE deletion increases as social status declines, as is shown in Number 3. Speakers in Class A, those of the highest status, delete the first negative 49.4 per-cent of the time, overall, those of Class B 58.8 per-cent of the time, and speakers of Class C, those of the lowest social status, delete the first negative from 84.5 per-cent of its potential occurrences. This pattern generally holds across the narrower categories given in 3 b thru e. Social

status remains a significant factor, seemingly independent of age and sex, except among the younger women of 3 d. These patterns of distribution are not surprising. Rather we see the typical case of the generalization of a linguistic change first among the youngest speakers and among those with least social status.

We have already seen in two instances that women in this corpus may be more advanced in the loss of NE than men. First, we noted in 2f that within Social Class C the older women deleted the first negative almost as frequently as their younger counterparts, whereas among the men of this same social class, the age difference was an important factor. Second, we noted in 3 d that among younger women generally, NE deletion does not appear to co-varry with social status. Number 4 displays additional correlations between first negative deletion and the sex of the speaker. Overall, women delete the first negative 68.7 per-cent of the time, while for men the incidence drops to 58 per-cent, a significant difference according to the chi-square test. Although within the narrower categories given in 4 b thru g women generally surpass men in their rate of first negative deletion, this variation does not prove significant among the older speakers of Social Class A, shown in 4 b, nor among the younger speakers of Classes B and C, shown in 4 e and g. Clearly the hypothesis of co-variation between the speakers' sex and his or her rate of NE deletion needs

further testing. The effect of style shifting within each category particularly should be explored in further work.

I now turn briefly to a few examples of possible co-variation between first negative deletion and internal linguistic factors. The data in Number 5 demonstrate that NE deletion is much more likely when the subject is a clitic pronoun than when it is not. With subject clitics the first negative is deleted from 71.9 per-cent of its potential occurrences, whereas with non-clitic subjects it is deleted only 34.8 per-cent of the time. This variation is highly significant according to the chi-square test, and shows the same pattern revealed in the Paris data of Ashby (1976). This phenomenon may be related to the continuing synthesis of the subject clitic and verb discussed in Ashby (1977). As the clitic and verb fuse on the morphological level, there may well be a tendency to eliminate the first negative, the only element which may now come between the clitic pronouns and the verb.

The French speaker has a choice of several second negatives. The data in Number 6 suggest that the deletion of NE may in part be dependent on this choice, since the rate of deletion does vary significantly depending on which second negative is involved.

Phonological context may also influence the deletion or retention of the first negative. In Ashby (1976) it was shown that NE tends to be retained in intervocalic context, apparently to prevent the hiatus of the two vowels. Data from the Tours corpus

given in Number 7 confirm this hypothesis. The first negative is deleted only 21.6 per-cent of the time when in intervocalic position, but 62.7 per-cent of the time elsewhere.

Vincent and Sankoff note in their corpus the effect of regressive nasal assimilation. This is apparently a significant factor in the French of Tours also, as is shown in Number 8. Before nasal vowels the first negative is deleted from only 50.5 per-cent of its potential occurrences overall, whereas in other phonological environments it is deleted 64 per-cent of the time.

Lexical factors may also be important. As in the Parisian data, NE deletion here is especially advanced within a few frequently recurring expressions, such as those given in Number 9. [ʃepa] for je ne sais pas, and [sepa] for ce n'est pas are especially prevalent to the point of being stereotypes of first negative deletion.

These are likely not the only linguistic factors having a significant effect on the deletion of the first negative, but they clearly establish the existence of such co-variation.

Let us now briefly consider the effect of stylistic factors. Vincent and Sankoff (1977) observed that most occurrences of NE in Montreal French were found when the topic of discourse was of a serious nature and when other markers of formal style were present. Topics such as language, education, religion and the disciplining of children apparently favored the retention of

the first negative. In order to test, informally, the effect of style in my corpus, I decided to examine the tokens in which the five speakers with the highest rate of NE deletion instead retained the first negative. These speakers are all of Social Class C, three are of the younger age stratum, and four are women. A total of 23 tokens in which NE was not deleted were emitted by these five speakers. In 4 of these the speaker either repeats or answers a question already containing the first negative. In two cases NE occurs after a false start, suggesting self-monitoring by the speaker. One token is a direct quotation. In five tokens the topic of discourse is the disciplining of children, while five others can be characterized, following Vincent and Sankoff, as "proverbial," that as, as generalizations about human nature. Two other tokens concern topics of a serious nature: the economic plight of farmers and a recent kidnapping. Only four tokens remain to contradict the hypothesis that formal topics of discourse disfavor the deletion of the first negative.

These Tourangeaux data have confirmed the importance of linguistic and stylistic factors in the deletion of the negative morpheme, NE. At the same time the patterns of their distribution among categories of age and social class have provided strong evidence that the loss of NE does represent a continuing change in the syntax of French. Once this change becomes nearly categorical the social factors may cease to be important, as has apparently

occurred in Montreal French. But in continental French, these factors remain at least as important as the linguistic and stylistic ones.

(Copies of this paper may be requested from the author.)

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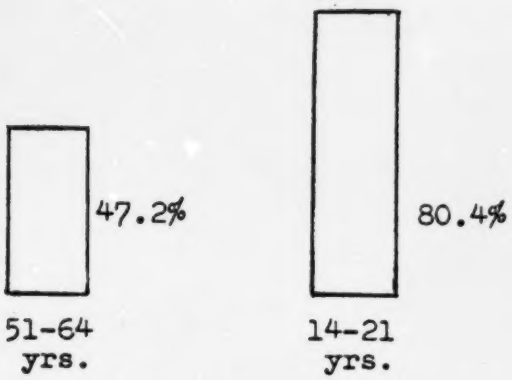
The status of the negative morpheme, NE, in the French of Tours

1. Examples (negative morphemes in capitals)

a. Jean NE sera PAS à Paris.	'Jean will not be in Paris.'
b. Je NE veux PLUS y aller.	'I don't want to go anymore.'
c. Tu NE vois RIEN?	'Don't you see anything?'
d. Elle NE réussira JAMAIS à ses examens.	'She'll never pass her examinations.'
e. La politique N'intéresse PERSONNE.	'Politics doesn't interest anyone.'
f. Il NE me reste QUE 30 francs.	'I only have 30 francs left.'
g. Je N'y vois AUCUN inconvénient.	'I don't see any disadvantage to it.'
h. Vous NE connaissez NI Marc NI sa soeur?	'Don't you know Marc or his sister either?'
i. La France N'a GUÈRE de pétrole.	'France hardly has any oil.'

2. Percentage of negative verbs with NE deleted, by age

a. In corpus, overall



N. 51-64 yrs.: 17
N. 14-21 yrs.: 18
N. Tokens: 2802
Chi-square: 330.18 (1 df)
P< .001

b. Class A, Women

51-64 yrs (N: 3): 24.3%
14-21 yrs (N: 3): 87.6%
N Tokens: 621
Chi-square: 251.71 (1 df)
P < .001

c. Class A, Men

51-64 yrs (N: 3): 27.4%
14-21 yrs (N: 4): 59.0%
N Tokens: 606
Chi-square: 53.41 (1 df)
P< .001

d. Class B, Women

51-64 yrs (N: 3): 31.7%
14-21 yrs (N: 2): 83.8%
N Tokens: 341
Chi-square: 93.77 (1 df)
P < .001

e. Class B, Men

51-64 yrs (N: 3): 41.4%
14-21 yrs (N: 3): 80.7%
N Tokens: 389
Chi-square: 61.37 (1 df)
P < .001

f. Class C, Women

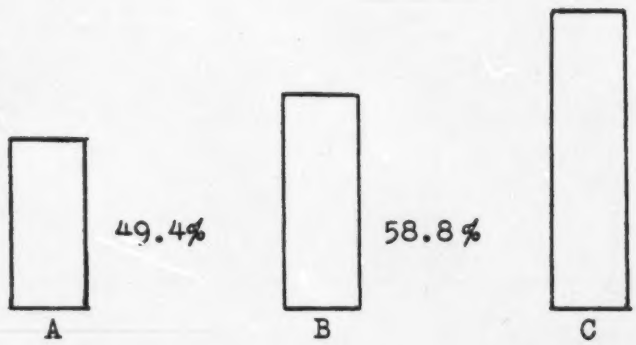
51-64 yrs (N: 3): 90.6%
14-21 yrs (N: 3): 94.0%
N Tokens: 474
Chi-square: 1.37 (1 df)
P < .30

g. Class C, Men

51-64 yrs (N: 2): 60.7%
14-21 yrs (N: 3): 92.8%
N Tokens: 371
Chi-square: 45.18 (1 df)
P<.001

3. Percentage of negative verbs with NE deleted, by social class

a. In corpus, overall



N Class A: 13
N Class B: 11
N Class C: 11
N Tokens: 2802
Chi-square: 230.60 (2 df)
P < .001

b. Women, 51-64 yrs

Class A (N: 3): 24.3%
Class B (N: 3): 31.7%
Class C (N: 3): 90.6%
N Tokens: 777
Chi-square: 291.92 (2 df)
P < .001

c. Men, 51-64 yrs

Class A (N: 3): 27.4%
Class B (N: 3): 41.4%
Class C (N: 2): 60.7%
N Tokens: 650
Chi-square: 41.96 (2 df)
P < .001

d. Women, 14-21 yrs

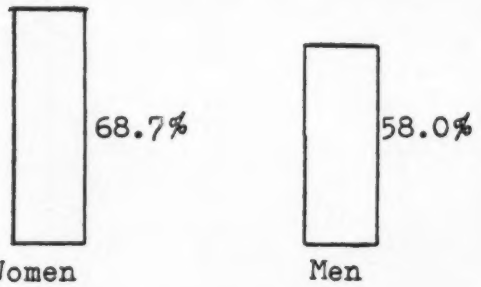
Class A (N: 3): 87.6%
Class B (N: 2): 83.8%
Class C (N: 3): 94.0%
N Tokens: 659
Chi-square: 5.76 (2 df)
P < .10

e. Men, 14-21 yrs

Class A (N: 4): 59.0%
Class B (N: 3): 80.7%
Class C (N: 3): 92.8%
N Tokens: 716
Chi-square: 58.07
P < .001

4. Percentage of negative verbs with NE deleted, by sex

a. In corpus, overall



N Women: 17
N Men: 18
N Tokens: 2802
Chi-square: 34.46 (1 df)
P<.001

b. Class A, 51-64 yrs

Women (N: 3): 24.3%
Men (N: 3): 27.4%
N Tokens: 493
Chi-square: 2.06 (1 df)
P< .30

c. Class A, 14-21 yrs

Women (N: 3): 87.6%
Men (N: 4) : 59.0%
N Tokens: 734
Chi-square: 63.19 (1 df)
P < .001

d. Class B, 51-64 yrs

Women (N: 3): 31.7%
Men (N: 3) : 41.4%
N Tokens: 442
Chi-square: 30.65 (1df)
P < .001

e. Class B, 14-21 yrs

Women (N: 2): 83.8%
Men (N: 3): 80.7%
N Tokens: 288
Chi-square: 1.90 (1 df)
P< .70

f. Class C, 51-64 yrs

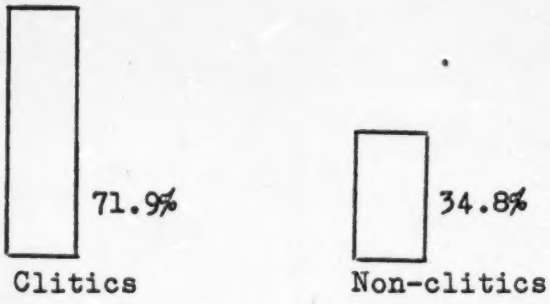
Women (N: 3): 90.6%
Men (N: 2): 60.7%
N Tokens: 492
Chi-square: 56.26 (1 df)
P < .001

g. Class C, 14-21 yrs

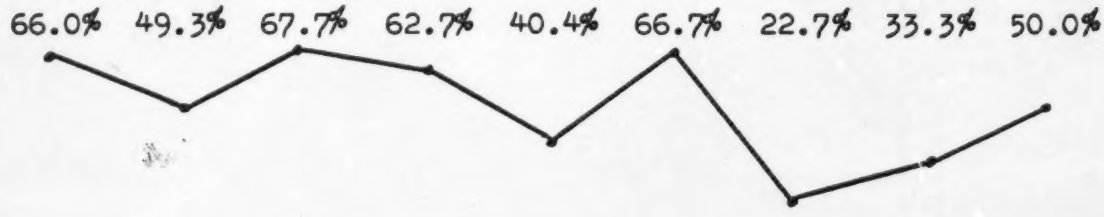
Women (N: 3): 94.0%
Men (N: 3): 92.8%
N Tokens: 353
Chi-square: .327 (1 df)
P < .70

5. Percentage of negative verbs with NE deleted, with clitic and non-clitic subjects

N Clitics: 2166
N Non-clitics: 636
N Tokens: 2802
Chi-square: 291.61 (1 df)
P < .001



6. Percentage of negative verbs with NE deleted, by second negative

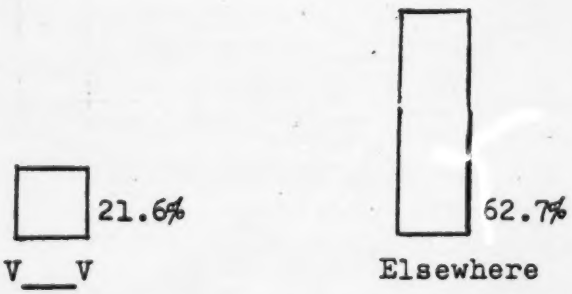


N:2320	N:142	N:117	N:75	N:119	N:9	N:22	N:6	N:2
pas	plus	rien	jamais	que	aucun	personne	ni...ni	guère

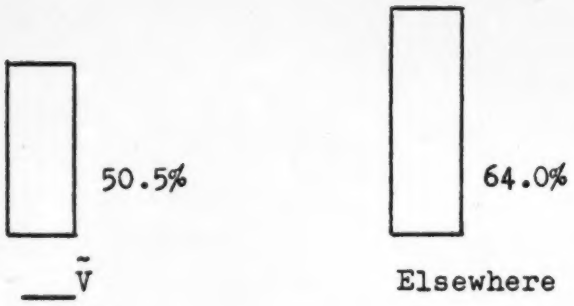
N Tokens: 2812
Chi-square: 58.21 (8 df)
P<.001

7. Percentage of negative verbs with NE deleted, in intervocalic position and elsewhere

N / V___V: 139
N elsewhere: 2663
N Tokens: 2802
Chi-square: 94.64
P < .001

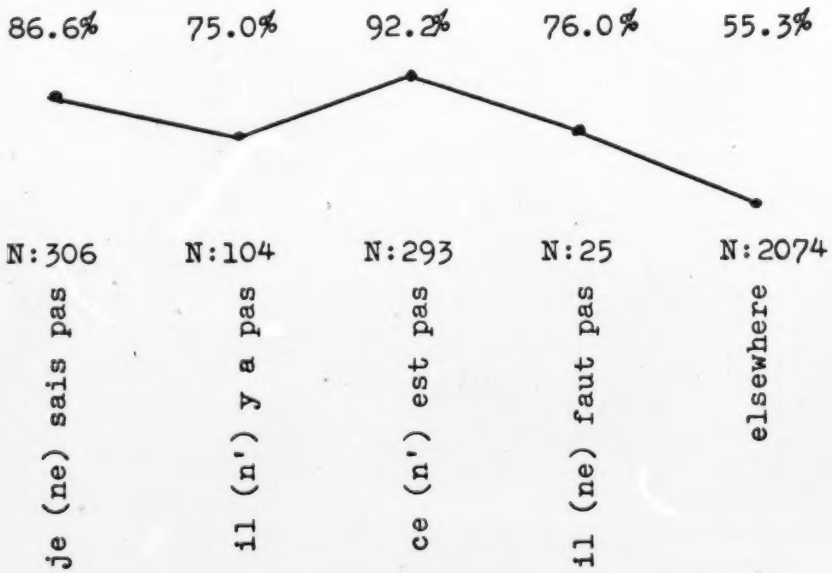


8. Percentage of negative verbs with NE deleted, before nasal vowels and elsewhere



N / ___Ṽ: 97
N elsewhere: 2705
Chi-square: 6.73 (df 1)
P < .01

9. Percentage of negative verbs with NE deleted, in selected formulae



N Tokens: 2802
Chi-square: 240.69 (4 df)
P < .001

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